

VZCZCXYZ0000  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0102/01 0311236  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 311236Z JAN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2896  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6549  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4322  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2933  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7493  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1546  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4887  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1101  
RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//  
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7225

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000102

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY  
SUBJECT: Syria/Spain, Russia, Syria/Turkey, Palestinian Territories,  
Lebanon, Iraq (1/31)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Jan. 31 reported that President Asad received, on Jan. 30, a phone call from Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero in which they discussed the Palestinian situation and current efforts to stop intra-Palestinian fighting. Premier Zapatero underscored Syria's important role in the dialogue among the Palestinian parties to form a government of national unity.

Papers also featured a statement on Jan. 30 by Alexander Sultanov, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and the Russian President's Special Envoy to the Middle East, confirming the impossibility of achieving peace in the Middle East without making progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Sultanov reiterated the call to hold an international conference for peace in the Middle East and adopt a strategy to resume negotiations on all tracks in the region. He added that the situation in the region urgently requires a discussion by the Quartet about steps needed to speed up the peace process. The Russian official indicated the need to form a Palestinian national unity government to handle the difficult situation the Palestinian people and the people of the region in general are passing through.

On Syria/Turkish relations, papers reported that Foreign Minister Walid Mouallem will visit Turkey Jan. 31 to discuss bilateral relations and recent developments in the region with Turkish officials.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad receives a phone call from Spanish Premier Zapatero on the situation in Palestinian territories and efforts to stop in-fighting" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/31)

"Foreign Minister Mouallem to visit Turkey today to discuss latest developments in the region and bilateral relations" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/31)

"Russia calls for an international conference for peace in the Middle East and a strategy to resume negotiations on all tracks" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/31)

"Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Presidential Envoy to Middle East Sultanov confirms impossibility of achieving peace in Middle East without making progress on Syrian and Lebanese tracks" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/31)

"Lebanese demonstrations reject foreign intervention and support the Opposition's demands. Hizbollah Secretary General of Nasrallah: Inciting sedition is an attempt to take revenge on the resistance" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/31)

"Baker and Hamilton testify before the Congress: Stability in the region will come from solving the Arab-Israeli crisis" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/31)

"Bolton: Iraq's unity does not serve [U.S.] interests" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/31)

"Calm returns to Gaza. Fatah and Hamas exchange prisoners. Abbas threatens early elections. Hanieh underscores the importance of a security organization for all Palestinians" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/31)

#### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

-----  
"Occupation's Role in Distancing Iraq from its Arab Neighborhood"

-----  
Salim Abbud, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (1/31): "After rivers of blood and conflict have flowed in Iraq, Americans are today trying to drag countries of the Arab region, as they did before, into imaginary dangers by diverting their attention from what is happening in Iraq and Palestine to the so-called Shiite

threat and the Iranian nuclear threat.

"Damascus, as usual, draws attention to the gravity of those attempts.... Syria is working hard to restore and strengthen relations with Iraq because this supports Iraq's unity, prevents domestic strife, and strengthens the resolve of the correct Iraqi resistance against occupation....

"The US has always applied pressure, before the occupation and at present, to prevent any rapprochement between Damascus and Baghdad, because it realizes the depth of relations between the two countries and peoples and the impact of this on the nature of the region and its desire to confront US and Zionist plans....

"Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's recent visit to Syria transcended this American desire and laid the proper foundations for resumption of relations between Syria and Iraq. The US occupation will try to undermine the results of this visit, but the bonds between the Iraqi and Syrian peoples are too strong to be broken, especially at this stage, when Iraq is experiencing a grave situation requiring serious and genuine cooperation from sisterly Syria to support security and stability in Iraq and foil any attempt to stoke the sectarian and ethnic conflict in the country...."

-----  
"Gambling Adventure"

-----  
Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (1/31): "Nothing indicates that the US Administration is reconsidering its policy in the region or correcting the mistakes that have brought tragedies upon the region and the United States itself....

"Americans continue to pursue the same policy in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories, while sending more troops and equipment to the region for a possible attack on Iran. This proves that the US Administration is implementing an American-Zionist strategy, the basic goal of which is to control the Middle East and its oil sources, ignite sectarian and denominational sedition in the region, and turn the Arab conflict with Israel into domestic conflicts in order to reshuffle the cards and rearrange the region."

-----  
"Will the Real Compass Come Back?"  
-----

Ghazi al-Dada, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (1/31): "It is regrettable that intra-Palestinian clashes are continuing while the Palestinian people are still fighting for their rights and occupied land...."

"Surely, no one can dispute that anyone who fires at his brother fires at himself, and anyone who sheds the blood of his brother sheds his own blood. The sedition, therefore, must be confronted and foiled. Palestinians must stick to their national unity and not give the Israeli-American schemes a chance to succeed. They must return to the language of dialogue and avoid the language of weapons, which pleases and serves only the Israeli enemy...."

Corbin